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Feeling Bodies, Feeling Borders: A Collective Exploration of Racialisation and Bordering in Britain

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Abstract

This article explores what embodied and affective experiences emerge as a result of racialisation when collectively exploring border encounters in Britain. It will argue that bodies and borders are deeply implicated in each other. In doing so, it will counter the understanding that borders are merely territorial demarcations, but rather situate the materialisation of borders through the body. My approach is informed by postcolonial readings of Britain, cultural affect studies and Neetu Khanna's theory of visceral logics. Through this intersecting framework, I unpack how the border materialises through the racialised body as a result of Britain's colonial and imperial structures. I show how these structures make themselves felt in the present, simultaneously through racialisation and bordering practices that define the ways in which the British national body is imagined: lived out as an inclusion or exclusion from the larger national body. The article's methodology is inspired by Shahram Khosravi's approach to auto-ethnography that places the self within the social context, bridging the gap between researchers and others. To this end, the findings emerge from a reading group constituted of five people whose migration to Britain as children was 'irregularised' (El-Enany, 2020). Through this reading group, we created a space to share poetry and fiction as tools to access the lived experience of bordering. Poetry from *The Sun's Brood*, a collectively made zine by the reading group, is embedded in this article.

Keywords
borders, bodies, art, research, racialisation, colonialism

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Introduction[1]

> A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants [...] In short, those who cross over and pass over, or go through the confines of the 'normal'. (Anzaldúa 1987: 25)

The word 'border' summons an image of hard edges along stark landscapes, a separating line, a fixed frontier. This image stands against Gloria Anzaldúa's border; hers is *in a constant state of transition*. It divides, but it is not bound to a particular territory. To imagine the border as *emotional residue* invites the body into our inquiry. How does this charged *residue* emerge through feeling? In looking at how borders and racialisation come together, this article makes a case for tending to the racialised affective response as a window into the bordered configurations of Britain. I draw on cultural affect studies and post-colonial readings of Britain to examine how 'the border takes its shape through colonial structures' (El-Enany 2020) and how this has an ongoing effect on the ways in which the British national body is imagined. Through an analysis of the discussions shared in a reading group, the texts we encountered and the texts we wrote collectively, this article develops a conceptual vocabulary of paranoia, strangeness, and resistance as ways of understanding the materialisation of borders through the body.

My sense of the border was transformed when encountering the work of Shahram Khosravi, whose study of how bodies collide with borders through 'the border ritual' (Khosravi 2010: 62) led me to the embodied and affective dimensions of bordering. In these border affects and through their performance on the travelling body, Khosravi contends that the nation finds its meaning. Khosravi's analysis is realised through an auto-ethnography that traces back his migration experience from Iran to Sweden. Inspired by this approach, I imagine what an auto-ethnography incorporating multiple people looks like – a collective auto-ethnography. This took the form of a reading group; I was excited by how the format encouraged mutual participation and relinquished some of the power linked with being a researcher. As part of the process, I looked at others who have experienced 'irregularised' migration to Britain – a term I borrow from Nadine El-Enany, who uses it instead of 'irregular' to emphasise 'the reason people find themselves without a legal status or a legal right to move' (El-Enany 2020: 228). By analysing the knowledge shared in the reading group, I extend Khosravi's argument to show how the nation-making project hinges on drawing borders and constructing the 'other' as the outsider (Khosravi 2010). In doing so, I insist that the travelling body in this construction is inherently racialised.

Drawing on cultural affect studies, I approach racialisation as *lived through embodiment;* so that 'surfaces of [racialised] bodies 'surface' as an effect of the impressions left by others' (Ahmed 2004b: 8). In looking to the embodiment of racialisation, I use the visceral as material analysis to make sense of how bodies and borders come together. Neetu Khanna defines the visceral as 'a dense and knotted set of relations between embodied

1 Italicised quotes are from transcripts of the reading group discussions. Names have been anonymised. I also have a pseudonym, as I shared the group's urge for anonymity in sharing personal experience.

experience and political feeling' (Khanna 2020: 1). Investing the visceral inquiry into racialisation links the 'psychic and somatic' (Khanna 2020: 30) and acknowledges the body as a politicised site of knowledge. This extends post-colonial understandings of Britain further by cementing how colonialism transcends into our corporeal being.

Provoking us to think through *feeling,* Ahmed elicits the 'body of the nation' as shaped by a 'circulation of signs of affect' (Ahmed 2004a: 12). The ongoing project of drawing the national body is manifold in its nature, so that these 'signs of affect' appear everywhere. Through this lens we can look at the so-called 'hostile environment', as the Home Secretary Theresa May declared in 2012. The hostile environment's policies invoke exactly that which the term implies: hostility directly connected with affect so as to conjure an antagonistic atmosphere that 'compels' individuals to leave. Ahmed reminds us that 'the surfaces of bodies 'surface' as an effect of the impressions left by others' and that individual and collective bodies 'take shape through such impressions' (Ahmed 2004b: 10). Through this we can see how the hostile environment has an impact on many different bodies, not just those it actively targets in its policies.

We can think of the particular impression Yasmin Gunaratnam has in constructing hostility and borders (Gunaratnam 2019). This article will address how paranoia, strangerhood, and resistance emerged in the reading group as affective traces of the impression of the border. Thinking of the nation-state as involved in giving rise to impressions, it is important to consider the effect these impressions have on racialised bodies. This is further strengthened by hundreds of years of recurrent pressing so that a particular impression is never just that we encounter, but rather implicates a long history of hostility.

Unsettling Methodologies

The methodology of this article is grounded in Decolonising Interpretive Research (DIR), an approach that centres the communal subaltern voice. Antonia Darder argues that the overarching purpose of DIR is to 'provide an emancipatory reformulation of the conceptual or ideological interrelationships that exist between theoretical explanations and practical applications from a particular location within a specific field of area of study' (Darder 2019: 6). Within this, the researcher is situated 'as an unapologetically political participant, whose knowledge is understood *a priori* as partial, unfinished, and deeply informed by historical, economic, and cultural configurations of the changing social and material conditions of our time' (Darder 2019: 7).

While imagining how a decolonising interpretive perspective could inspire a research method, I was inspired by the possibilities of a reading group. I envisioned a space with other racialised people who experienced 'irregularised' (El-Enany 2020) travel where we could discuss poetry and fiction as tools to access embodied experience and shared affective knowledge. The initiation of the reading group coincided with the global outbreak of COVID-19. This affected the research in various ways, the most notable being that the reading group sessions, discussions, and zine-making occurred online on a video conference platform. In the virtual medium, my desire for a shared responsibility of the space, without my corporeality as a researcher intervening, was facilitated. This comes in line with my thinking of the way in which bodies can assert power in different ways through their movement. Shifting to the virtual meant that session facilitation was in some ways more accessible than an in-person reading group, thoughts were prepared beforehand and read aloud without being overly conscious of being observed – especially important in the beginning as we got to know each other.

The fact that everyone was in their own space created a sense of intimacy and allowed us to get to know each other's daily surroundings in a time of being confined to our homes. This intimacy was heightened because of the uncertainty brought about by the pandemic, so that the online space became one where we shared news of our static but quickly changing lives. We discussed our daily schedules, news of the pandemic, sadness at the disproportionate deaths of racialised people, updates of jobs (both lost and newly found). We used a WhatsApp group where we scheduled sessions and shared different materials set for meetings: PDFs of books we had been enjoying, memes as well as hastily typed

stories of encounters from our everyday lives. As I continue to receive notifications with extracts of prose, poetry, and links to films, I am reminded that the processes we set in motion did not end with our last meeting.

This method echoes Darder's contention that DIR is 'uncompromisingly committed to creating counterhegemonic intellectual spaces in which new readings of the world can unfold, in ways that lead us toward possibilities of social and material change' (Darder 2019: 18). Facilitating *new readings of the world* is at the heart of this method. The use of poetry and fiction has been highlighted by many decolonial thinkers. In one of her classic essays *Poetry is Not a Luxury,* Audre Lorde powerfully asserts that 'it is through poetry that we give name to those ideas which are, until the poem, nameless and formless-about to be birthed, but already felt' (Lorde 1984: 36). This ability of poetry (and fiction) to evoke that which is known through the body, but is yet to be theorised grounds its transformative potential.

As a part of the reading group process, we decided to work towards a collaborative project to capture the conversations we shared.

> I just think it's really important that we capture that this reading group, at least for me, has been an act of care and an act of love. I think it's important to capture all of this! (Zaphia)

To this end, we incorporated zine making.[2] Historically, zines have been used to share knowledge and to include marginalised voices. In Britain, we have seen how zines have been used by Black and women of colour organising anti-racist and anti-imperialist movements. As an example, Lola Olufemi writes about The Organisation of Women of African and Asian Descent and how they 'used zines, community press and their newsletter, FOWAAD!, to communicate their work to the local community' in the 1970s (Olufemi 2020: 15). In compiling the zine, our co-creation turned towards creative writing. This seemed an instinctive path to take since prose and poetry have been so central to the conversations we shared. This process was grounded in sharing skills for individual and collective expression, which was important as it reiterated that the strength of the research design lay in the research process rather than the theoretical outcome so that through creative writing we found the tools to (re)narrate our own stories under our own terms. I thus came to realise how relevant it was to have a physical embodiment of our conversations and to make them accessible.

2 Zines are 'non-commercial, non-professional, small-circulation magazines which their creators produce, publish, and distribute by themselves' (Duncombe 1997: 6).

The zine came to represent our mutual labour in the research process and stands as a depiction of the knowledge we created, as well as our boundless potential in making sense of the world. I think of this through bell hooks' affirmation on coming *to voice* as resistance (hooks 1989). The research process and the making of the zine enriched and shaped our *coming to voice.* In the zine, we see an alternative analysis that incorporates the conversations we shared. Accordingly, it touches themes of borders, race, fear, class, identity, resistance, strangerhood, kinship and the body. These are not necessarily linear or easily perceptible to the reader; that was not the intention. Instead, the content the zine prioritises is the articulation of what *felt* right to the group, in whatever abstract way that manifested itself. The result of these sessions is a 22-page zine, entitled *The Sun's Brood* which emerges as the encounter between embodied experience and entangled lives; an archive of our individual and collective positionalities.

Complexities and Tensions

Unpacking what it means to conduct research with/in marginal communities, Fairn Herising explores the 'politics of location between the researcher and the communities that we propose to enter' (Herising 2005: 14), relational locations she terms 'thresholds of passages'. This notion invokes Gloria Anzaldúa's writing on thresholds as transitions 'to other realities, archetypal, primal symbols of shifting consciousness' (Anzaldúa 2002: 1). According to Herising, in a decolonising research praxis 'thresholds of passages' (Herising 2005: 128) the researcher is required to pose substantive critical questions, one of which is 'how do we negotiate the chasm between ourselves and the communities we propose to research?' (Herising 2005: 130). Addressing this question in my own research, I think of

the ways in which I have access to power through my capacity to control how the reading group is made visible. Zaphia poses this question through her reflections on Queer and People of Colour (POC) spaces when she explains how they allow for

> …being seen and also being able to not be seen because you can be recognised but you are not an object of sight. Like you are not there to be perceived (Zaphia).

What does it mean to be entrusted into the lives you enquire with, and have control over the way these lives unfold within the academic field? Zaphia's appeal to *not being an object of sight* is significant when considering how Black, Indigenous and POC individuals have been precisely this in the world of research – which explains why 'research' is a dirty word in these communities (Smith 1999; Tuck 2009). I also think of Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang's exploration of how to negotiate knowledge cultivation in academia as they ask, 'what knowledges does the academy deserve?' (Tuck & Yang 2014: 233). I have a responsibility as a researcher in opening up the reading group and our discussions to others, especially white others. With this in mind, I acknowledge there is a lot of information from the reading group that is not included in this paper, considering that some knowledges are not supposed to be shared as Tuck and Yang assert; 'it is enough that we know them' (Tuck & Yang 2014: 234). This awareness is reflected in the reading group and its outcome is shown in a zine comprising acts of creative writing, illustrations, and collage.

Despite a decolonial methodology addressing coloniality in the academy, there is still some tension relating to being part of these institutions, even when working against its oppressive structures. In this case, the tension emerges from my aspiration for a transformative reading group and the reality of the process having its final form within the academy. There is distance to be found as one could contradict themselves. How do I navigate this? I acknowledge that research, no matter how transformative in its design and outcome, can never completely escape the colonial clutch of academia. When considering the process, I think how this research and the journey of the reading group could take place because, as a student, I had the time to create the framework, alongside funding from the Danish state to financially sustain myself. This also challenges how collaborative the research can be, since I am paid to prioritise the reading group, whereas everyone else participates on different terms. For some, the process occurred after their workday or in between other responsibilities which structure their lives. This also potentially limits who was able to participate, as not everyone has the ability to allocate their time for such an endeavour.

While doing the research was a fruitful experience, it cannot be separated from the knowledge outcome created for the academy. In negotiating this, I have worked to ensure that the knowledge shared through the reading group does not become *an object of sight* and to present ourselves as active agents in the process of making sense of our own lives. These unfolding antagonisms are an important part of the research process and tending to them requires innumerable resources.

Approaching the Body

The findings of this article will be thought of by connecting the analytics lenses relating to bodies and borders with the experiences shared within the reading group.

I weave together some of the material we encountered alongside the discussions in order to contextualise how both these processes fed into each other. While doing so, I intend to embody the feeling of coming together as a group and the processes that moved us towards articulating resistance.

Paranoia as a Visceral Logic

I will explore the way paranoia emerges as a 'momentum that stages a loss of control over the reflexes of one's own body' (Khanna 2020: 24), situating this response as awareness of the 'biopolitical climates of racialisation on racially marked bodies' (Gunaratnam 2019: 134). We came to reflect on paranoia through the poem WE DID NOT BRING THIS DARK-

NESS UPON OURSELVES by Suhaiymah Manzoor-Khan from her collection *Postcolonial Banter (*Manzoor-Khan 2019*).* The narrator traces the lives of their mother and siblings and negotiates state surveillance, trauma, racism, and Islamophobia. The poem gives form to the different ways in which the border is found in the corporeal:

> by crazy I mean in a state of constant hypervigilance
>
> […]
>
> by crazy I mean seeing ourselves targeted every day
>
> by crazy I mean in pain
>
> I mean devastated anxious unable to sleep
>
> slumped shoulders and aching backs
>
> *(*Manzoor-Khan 2019: 51)

In this passage, we see how the border appears in the everyday and expresses itself literally in the body; Manzoor-Khan evokes a distressed subject carrying the heavy weight of the border. Here the visceral emerges through the narrator's anxiety, their pain and inability to sleep, in the slumped shoulder and aching back. These textural bodily descriptions take us through the racialised emotion of *seeing ourselves targeted every day* and the way this lodges itself in corporeal reflexes. The narrator addresses how their body holds knowledge of being situated in Britain:

> for as long as I am in this body at this time, though I do not
>
> know a lot
>
> I know not to trust
>
> I know that this is a police state
>
> I know that I am unwanted
>
> (Manzoor-Khan 2019: 52)

There is heaviness attached to the act of *knowing* described in the passage. The border is pressed onto the narrator through state surveillance and the feeling of being unwanted. Nira Yuval-Davis et al. assert that 'technologies of everyday bordering and securitisation that are supposedly aimed at making people feel safe by keeping out those who do not belong can end up undermining these feelings of safety and raising instead a sense of precarity' (Yuval-Davis et al. 2019: 7). This precarity is evident in Manzoor-Khan's narrator, as she claims that the affirmation 'those who do not belong' is an accusation against those who do not fit the image of the white national body. El-Enany expands on asserting that 'racialised people in Britain, whether categorised as citizens, migrants, refugees, asylum seekers or third country nationals, are habitually understood as having come from somewhere else' (El-Enany 2020: 219). El-Enany maintains that this sentiment of coming from elsewhere is deeply embedded in 'white entitlement to colonial spoils' (El-Enany 2020: 225). Thus, rejection of certain subjects from the national imaginary is experienced as bordering; the border sticks when you are racialised. Maya relates to this negotiation of paranoia at home:

> Growing up, my dad always had this fear that someone had come into his house fucked with his passport, and that people had taken his fingerprints while he was sleeping, so a lot of conversations of my life were spent talking about the practicalities, trying to say that no one has been in because we've all been in the house. (Maya)

The experience Maya shares points to how the initial encounter of her father with border repeats itself in his everyday hypervigilance and deep fear of his passport being taken away. We can reflect on this through Sarah Keenan's argument of 'taking [the border] space with you' (Keenan 2019: 81), the space at the intersection of racialisation, bordering and trauma. Trauma is intergenerational as we can see in Manzoor-Khan's poem, as well as in Maya's experience that is passed down through migration histories.

Negotiating paranoia is also explored by Katrine Dirckinck-Holmfeld, who in her writing about Lebanon explores the experience of (para)paranoia; 'a self-reflexive form of paranoia in which the subject is fully aware of its own paranoia, but it is only through a stylisation of the paranoid position that the subject is able to fashion a reparative practice' (Dirckinck-Holmfeld 2019: 3). In our group, 'stylisation of the paranoid position' occurred in different ways, some of which revealed through Zaphia's monologue:

> I really fall down this rabbit hole of this authoritarian dystopia where you get paid to snitch on people, and in 10 years' time, they would have revoked the law that means I have my passport, and then this person would remember this time in uni when someone told them that they were once a bit illegal, and then my whole family would be deported to country (Zaphia).

We see how the border appears through the fear of being removed from Britain, in a law being revoked, in deportation, in being caught by the Home Office. Eve Sedgwick illustrates how paranoia, at its core, is an impulse to predict what is ahead and, in this way, 'burrows backward and forward because there must be no bad surprises' and 'news [must] be already known' (Sedgwick 2003: 130). Whilst sharing paranoid positions, the intersection of 'irregularised' (El-Enany 2020) travel and racialisation came together. This points to an awareness El-Enany defines as 'go home decree'- an extension of 'Britain's post-colonial articulation of its borders and national identity' that has 'driven the assumption that anyone who is not white could not be *from* Britain' (El-Enany 2020: 219).

Relatedly, in the group we also observed how lying emerged as a response to paranoia – lying becomes an invention of or altering of identity. The lies are not representative of untruth but speak of how identity is shaped; lies can slowly shape identity and become truth. A lie is a particular use of truth when it manages the paranoia of state surveillance.

> I think it's crazy that I've only recently realised how good I am at lying, and how duplicitous I can be. My ex, when we were together, she had this whole thing about truth, like she hated lying, and it just forced me to constantly be aware of how much I would lie. And how much, if it made me feel more convenient or less insecure, or safer, I could so naturally do that. That's one thing that comes to mind as a big consequence of living that life, where you have to lie (Zaphia).

> I think also the specific situation when I lied were always when I felt I was under interrogation, or under scrutiny. (Zaphia)

I want to address how we can make sense of the impulse of lying as a visceral logic, how it comes *naturally* if needing to *feel safer or less insecure*. Khanna reminds us that visceral response is 'inextricable from the psyche and consciousness of the racialized subject' (Khanna 2020: 7). In this way, I think of the compulsion to lie as of an embodied awareness of political climates. Ahmed reminds us that one consequence of colonialism is that an extensive majority of racialised people have 'inherit[ed] the impossibility of extending the body's reach' (Ahmed (2007: 163). Through this take on corporeality and its relation to space, I argue that the urge to lie can be viewed as an embodied response, as a way to extend 'the body's reach' in a given moment. When Zaphia says 'the specific situation when I lied were always when I felt I was under interrogation', we see how 'racialized repositories' produce an 'automated response' (Khanna 2020: 7). We can look at this extension of the body as a tool to push back against bordering processes. Yuval-Davis et al.'s conceptualisation of bordering as 'situated and constituted in the specificity of political negotiations as well as in the everyday life performances of these negotiations' (Yuval-Davis et al. 2019: 24) is useful for considering the urge of lying emerging as part of a political negotiation.

Anticipating Racism

> A body in touch with the world becomes a body that fears the touch of a world. The world is experienced as sensory intrusion. (Ahmed 2017b: 23)

Continuing the discussion on how the visceral emerged in our reading group, I will look at the way the anticipation of racism manifests itself as an extension of paranoia, acknowledged as a lingering tension in the body. Khanna writes that the visceral 'offers a materialist analytic that recasts the scene of racialized affect through the energetic dynamic that reverberates between two bodies, animating and activating racialized repositories in automated response' (Khanna 2020: 7). I will explore this *automated response* and how it is a visceral reflex embedded in the knowledge of racialisation. The following dialogue between Zaphia and Sahar explores this anticipation of racism:

> I think also like instinctively being afraid from a young age, whenever I have had an explicitly racist encounter I always feel like a spy that has been prepared their whole life, I am so calm, in some ways those moments I feel the least fear because I've become very prepared for these moments (Zaphia).
>
> Because you're always on edge, you are always prepared, so when it comes at you, you are just like yep… (Sahar)

Reflecting on the expectation of racism, we see that Zaphia prepares herself *like a spy*, the calm she evokes as a result of this preparation. The calm of the racist encounter is in blunt contrast to the *fear,* the *waiting* mentioned by Sahar. The contrast is heightened as the dialogue inverts our assumption of a charged racist encounter. In this we see how the automated response of being *prepared for these moments* comes at the price of being *always on edge*. Stanley Rachman posits that anxiety can be described as the 'tense anticipation of a threatening but vague event' or a feeling of 'uneasy suspense' (Rachman 1998: 2). Sianne Ngai adds that when the anxiety-inflicting event is faced it's already in the past, having been lived through in the constant anticipation (Ngai 2001). We see this affirmation in the conversation between Zaphia and Sahar. There is a relief, a confirmation of what the body already knows. This is similar to the experience of paranoia, of which Sedgwick mentions it entails 'the receiving again of knowledge of what one already knows' (Sedgwick 2003: 124).

This notion is reflected in this statement from Naila:

> I realised that the majority of my friends are people of colour and I think that's a pretty natural thing that my mind, or my body has done as a way to avoid these situations (Naila).

The excerpt above shows the attempts of boundary-making against being racialised. The anticipation of racialisation manifests itself in the people one spends time with, as individuals guard themselves against racism by creating a boundary between their intimate and public life.

I contend that Naila's strategies of relating to white people can be viewed as a reaction to the way the national body is 'impressed upon' (Ahmed 2004b: 145) her. Through this lens, we see how racism can lead individuals to create their own bordering strategies in everyday encounters so as to manage the anxiety related to race.

Moving Towards a 'Reparative Practice'

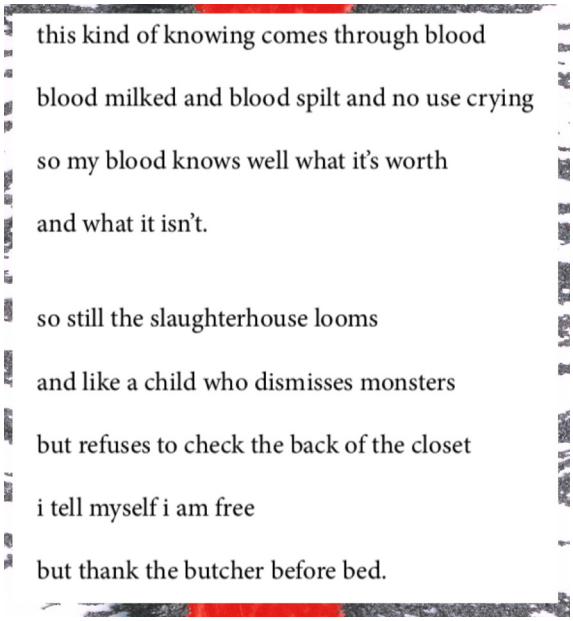
Dirckinck-Holmfeld's assertion that 'reparative practice is not to do away with paranoia and suspicion all together' (Dirckinck-Holmfeld 2019: 3) but rather that there is a transformation of the 'paranoid impulses into a creative, enabling and reflexive practice' (Dirckinck-Holmfeld 2019: 4) which helps framing some of the processes that took place within the reading group. In this way, Manzoor-Khan's poem invited us to find words to express our own paranoid positions. Part of this process involved framing paranoia as a rational response to structural events, rather than seeing it as irrational and pathological:

> I think it reflects how much we've internalised a Western super logical approach to things, and that sometimes that can make you doubt your intuition or make you feel your intuition is invalid. […] In that situation she's not wrong for being paranoid, the state is wrong for making her feel paranoid (Zaphia).

Zaphia addresses how paranoia can be a mode of knowledge in itself, an intuition of your surroundings. In the poem we see how paranoia is instilled by state surveillance and thus becomes completely rational and an intuitive mode of knowledge. In her narrative, Manzoor-Khan shows how the experience of state violence transforms into an 'illogical' knowing when borne by racialised subjects. In this way, the poem is equally about the state's paranoia in fixating on surveillance of racialised and Muslim citizens, as well as about the paranoid experiences of the family. We see paranoia as a state sanctioned mode of governing, as well as a representation of irrationality when it is claimed by racialised individuals. When operationalised by the state, however, paranoia is legitimate. I contend that understanding paranoia as a mode of knowledge and working towards a reparative practice implies framing 'Britain as a racially and colonially configured space' (El-Enany 2019b: para.3). This allows us then to unpack Manzoor-Khan's stylisation of paranoia, which attains poetic force through the heavy and embodied knowledge of being racialised:

> and I mean that targeted racism is trauma on a mass scale
>
> being made helpless again and again every day repeat, repress,
>
> replay
>
> standing stock still
>
> adrenaline pumping
>
> no means to fight
>
> nowhere to flight
>
> fearing the repetition
>
> it coming anyway
>
> (Manzoor-Khan 2019: 51)

The extract shows the visceral affect building up in the text through the repetition: *again and again,* as well as the phrase *every day repeat, repress, replay*. Manzoor-Khan plays with building up this energy by increasing the pace of the poem; through repetition, horror intensifies. There is a 'transfer and transaction of emotive energies' (Khanna 2020: 7) between the narrator and the reader. *The Sun's Brood* contains a similar stylisation of paranoia. In this first extract of a poem from the zine, the narrator addresses racialised sensibilities; paranoia becomes a response to *knowing*, and to how this knowledge comes from (violent) experiences.



this kind of knowing comes through blood

blood milked and blood spilt and no use crying

so my blood knows well what it's worth

and what it isn't.

so still the slaughterhouse looms

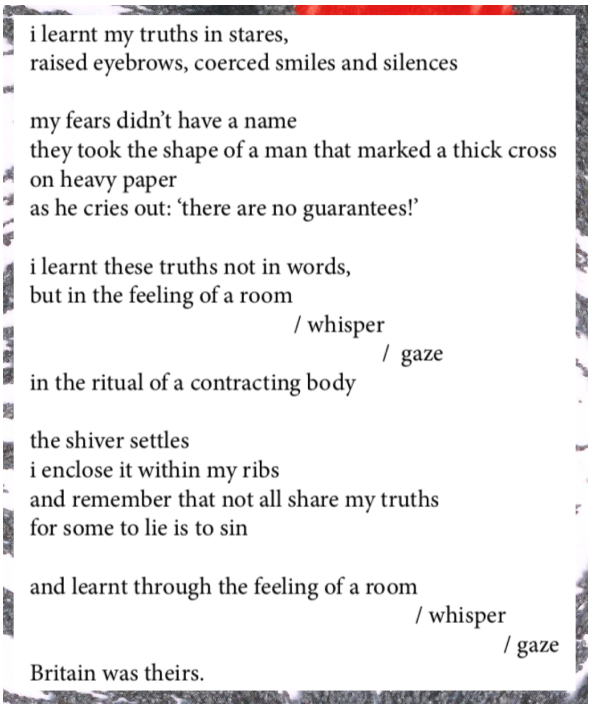
and like a child who dismisses monsters

but refuses to check the back of the closet

i tell myself i am free

but thank the butcher before bed.

This second extract from a different poem in the zine also addresses paranoia and how it is encountered through the affective and embodied.



i learnt my truths in stares,
raised eyebrows, coerced smiles and silences

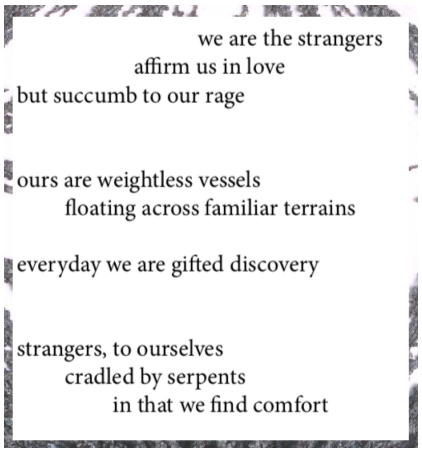
my fears didn't have a name
they took the shape of a man that marked a thick cross
on heavy paper
as he cries out: 'there are no guarantees!'

i learnt these truths not in words,
but in the feeling of a room
/ whisper
/ gaze
in the ritual of a contracting body

the shiver settles
i enclose it within my ribs
and remember that not all share my truths
for some to lie is to sin

and learnt through the feeling of a room
/ whisper
/ gaze
Britain was theirs.

The visceral logics of paranoia are evoked *not in words* but in the *contracting body,* in its *shivers*, in the way it takes meaning through *the feeling of a room.* In *Britain was theirs*, we see how the embodied knowledge found in a room/whisper/gaze transfers to how the national space is related to. This line evokes many conversations shared in the reading group, and ultimately links back to an awareness of the ways in which the nation continues to be contested as a space for white Britons.



we are the strangers
affirm us in love
but succumb to our rage

ours are weightless vessels
floating across familiar terrains

everyday we are gifted discovery

strangers, to ourselves
cradled by serpents
in that we find comfort

(Un)chosen Strangerhood

Strangerhood appeared in the reading group at once as imposed and as chosen feeling. I will reflect on strangerhood as a position that is not only constructed by, but also that constructs the nation. This process of stranger-making has a specific historical context in Britain due to its particular kind of coloniality. Sara Ahmed writes that the racialisation of the stranger 'is not immediately apparent—it is disguised, we might say, by the

strict anonymity of the stranger, the one who after all, we are told from childhood, could be anyone' (Ahmed 2014: para.6). I will address the notion of racializing the stranger and how this position is affectively experienced. To frame the reflections, I will refer to an extract from a British National Front poster that Ahmed introduces in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Ahmed 2004b):

> Every day of every year, swarms of illegal immigrants and bogus asylum seekers invade Britain by any means available to them . . . Why? They are only seeking the easy comforts and free benefits in Soft Touch Britain. All funded by YOU – The British Taxpayer! (British National Front Poster, cited in Ahmed 2004b: 1)

Ahmed's analysis of the poster gives insight into the affective power of nation-making. She draws attention to the 'Soft Touch Britain' and to the pronoun 'YOU'. Throughout this process, the reader is enticed to assume the pronoun 'you' and the rage against the other that comes with it (Ahmed 2004b). This is reflected in Paul Gilroy's writing in relation to what he terms 'post-colonial melancholia' (Gilroy 2004) which Back and Sinha explain as such:

> an obsessive desire to retain Britain's relationship to its lost empire and imperial greatness. The result is a melancholic affective state that oscillates between an inflated sense of international importance, euphoria and national jubilation or phobia and hatred directed towards outsiders. (Back & Sinha 2018: 133)

In 'post-colonial melancholia' we can see how the visceral appears in the *euphoria* and *phobia.* Similarly, in the BNP poster, we see how national rage is enticed and emerges through visceral logics. Affect is slowly built, firstly through the repetition of *everyday of every year,* and then through the *why* question and the response which comes as gentle prod; note how the use of the phrase 'they are only', poses a reasonable argument until one gets to the phrase: 'funded by YOU'*;* the poster works to entice 'the heat of a righteous [national] rage' (Khanna 2020: 13). We encounter, as Gilroy contends, the euphoria of coming to this rage, and the phobia of the outsider simultaneously (Gilroy 2004). How far does this 'other' that the poster warns of extends? While it presents 'swarms of illegal immigrants and bogus asylum seekers' as the source of injury, we instinctively know it doesn't end there. And while the 'YOU' is undefined, intuition tells us to whom the poster speaks.

I draw on Ahmed's analysis to make the argument that Britain as a nation continues to be constructed affectively through excluding racialised bodies. We can think of this exclusion as a bordering process that denies racialised bodies their space within the imaginary of the nation. Maya's reflection speaks to Ahmed's analysis:

> By not being able to claim Britishness and this country as your own you stop yourself from feeling invested here. Being here and contributing should mean this society is yours but I've realised this is distinctively not true [...] you are made to feel you can't shape this society (Maya).

Maya thus links the idea of being a stranger with the feeling that Britain cannot acknowledge the existence of certain bodies. I want to pay particular attention to the notion of *feeling* the nation as fixed*,* and how this fixity results in discomfort. In *Queer Feelings*, Ahmed considers comfort by transferring affect to an object. Through an encounter with a chair, she shows how 'comfort is about the fit between body and object' and 'the promise of a "sinking" feeling' (Ahmed 2004b: 148). This analogy of sinking into a comfortable chair invites reflection on the affective experience of being racialised in a nation made white through colonialism (El-Enany 2020). In thinking along with the feeling and motion of occupying a chair, I analyse the visceral as opposite to the 'sinking feeling' (Ahmed 2004b: 148). The chair rejects racialised bodies which has different consequences from street racism to necropower (Mbembe 2003). In thinking of how the border appears through the body, the BNP poster further illuminates how the national body is conjured to compel certain emotions. Ahmed expands the evocation of a 'Soft Touch Britain' by addressing how it suggests that 'the nation's borders and defences are similar to skin; they are soft, weak, porous and easily shaped or even bruised by the proximity of others (Ahmed 2004b: 2).

There is a contrast between the BNP's 'Soft Touch Britain' and Maya's Britain that evokes

hardness and inability to be shaped. While considering once again the chair Ahmed evokes, the absences of the 'sinking feeling' (Ahmed 2004b: 148) described by Maya in her reflection of Britain become tangible. In the poster, we can see how the phrase 'swarms of illegal immigrants and bogus asylum seekers invade Britain' asserts a need for ordering – for stricter governance over British borders; while 'All funded by YOU – The British Taxpayer!' implies that the body of the nation is white while simultaneously 'othering' those who do not fit this image of the national body. This replicates what Ghassan Hage describes as paranoid nationalism, which 'sets in when…the aggressive politics of the border takes over the very interior it is supposed to be protecting' (Hage 2003: 32). In comparison, Maya reveals how bordering and othering interlace so that racialised bodies are unable to *claim Britishness,* lacking the ability of *feeling invested;* an embodied knowledge of the hardness of the national body.

Rethinking Strangerhood

> Yes, here's a room
> so warm & blood-close,
> I swear, you will wake—
> & mistake these walls
> for skin.
>
> (Vuong 2015)

This section will analyse what it means to claim strangerhood both as a liberatory and a challenged position. I frame this in the dialogue below from the reading group, as well as in Ahmed's article *Home and Away: Narratives of Migration and Estrangement* (Ahmed 1999).

> There is a sense where I hate England, like I don't want to be associated with that, I don't want to be associated with 'Britishness', but that's not because I don't like fish and chips, it's because what I associate that nationalism with is white supremacy, and so to claim your nationality kind of feels like an endorsement of that (Zaphia).
>
> But that's the contradiction, I feel as though to exist here you have to claim your allegiance or demonstrate that you really believe in British values. There's also this not wanting to do that, because of all the fucked-up shit Britain has done and continues to do, but then also wanting to or also feeling entitled to 'Britishness', whatever that is (Zahra).

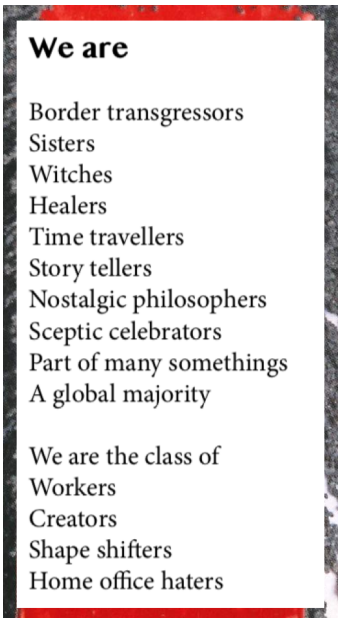
In this dialogue, we see how the nation is an inappropriate fit, but the analogy is somewhat inverted since the subject is seen in a process of challenging power. Ahmed writes that the idealist image of home 'involves the enveloping of subjects in a space which is not simply outside of them: being-at-home suggests that the subject and space leak into each other, *inhabit each other*' (Ahmed 1999: 341, original emphasis). Extending this notion to suggest that home is the nation, I argue that for racialised subjects, belonging in Britain does not reflect the seamless encounter of 'home as skin'. Zaphia speaks of a 'hate for England' underpinned by 'white supremacy'. Similarly, Zahra voices not wanting to align with 'British values' because of 'all the fucked-up shit Britain has done'. In this way I consider how Zaphia and Zahra claim strangerhood for its ability to create distance between them and Britain's post-colonial position. Later in this article, I will look at how strangerhood becomes the motivation to look for and to create alternative spaces where the 'White nation fantasy' (Hage 1998: 19) does not play out. It is worth noting here that this can be a privileged position, which racialised people without stable citizenship do not necessarily have the ability to claim.

There is a question worth posing here: to what extent is claiming strangerhood liberatory when it is a reaction to being made stranger in the first place? The group's conflicting relationship to strangerhood reinforces Ahmed's attempt to look beyond the 'home' and 'away' binary which 'stabilizes the home as a place with boundaries that are fixed, such that homes become pure, safe and comfortable' (Ahmed 1999: 339) and 'away' becomes 'a strange land' (Chambers 1994: 18). Thinking home/away through national belonging,

we see how Britain could never be 'pure, safe and comfortable' for the people residing there. This dichotomy collapses with the presence of the racialised 'strangers' that challenge the desire for a white nation. We can look to empire and the extension of the British border 'to encompass as much of the world as possible' (Keenan 2019: 79) to make this even more complex. Instead of claiming strangerhood as a transgressive position, Ahmed explores processes of estrangement: 'the word estrangement has the same roots as the word 'strange'. And yet, it suggests something quite different. It indicates a process of transition, a movement from one register to another' (Ahmed 1999: 342). Applying this lens to the reading group allows for a greater understanding of the contested nature of belonging in Britain. Estrangement allows for flexibility in its naming of 'the process of moving from one to the other' (Ahmed 1999: 344). We find the visceral lurking in the movement, in its intuitive progression. Estrangement, in its emphasis on the transition from 'one register to another' (Ahmed 1999: 343) invites reflection on the processes urging the shift. Its shifting temporality plays out in Zahra's articulations of her not wanting to claim her allegiance to Britain, while she simultaneously feels *entitled to.* In its ability to account for movement, the subject can move back and forth between positions of estrangement. I would argue this more suitably reflects racialised experiences in Britain; it is not a fixed position of persistent estrangement. It also allows for a move towards the collective. Ahmed addresses how estrangement facilitates the emergence of contested communities, 'a community which 'makes a place' in the act of reaching out to the 'out of place-ness' of other [racialised] migrant bodies' (Ahmed 1999: 345). This echoes Donna Haraway's plea to kin making as assemblages that transcend ancestral or genealogical ties (Haraway 2016). We can look at this position, like hooks, as a 'marginality one chooses as site of resistance – as location of radical openness and possibility' (hooks 1989: 23).

Articulating Resistance

In the process of planning the zine, a clear formulation of how we came to situate our understanding of joy and resistance emerged. Central to this was an appeal to speak collectively; to speak as *we*. We can see this in this extract from a poem we collectively wrote for the zine:



We are

Border transgressors
Sisters
Witches
Healers
Time travellers
Story tellers
Nostalgic philosophers
Sceptic celebrators
Part of many somethings
A global majority

We are the class of
Workers
Creators
Shape shifters
Home office haters

The poem embodies the conversations shared at the beginning of the writing process around identity and the transgressive power of self-definition outside imposed binaries. Central to it is a celebration of plurality, as a response to being *fixed* to a particular identity or narrative, as the pronoun *we* propose a transformative intervention. Reading Gloria Anzaldúa we were urged to visualise crossroads, to prioritise plurality to push back on

bordering (Anzaldúa 1987). Our discussions turned to challenging identity categories we have negotiated. In this reflection from Zahra, we see how Anzaldúa's work influenced the making of the collective poem *We are:*

> I like the idea of it not being necessarily one thing that we are putting ourselves under, and it being many different identities or markers. I think something about challenging these binaries that often exist with migration, and situating yourself not even between that but challenging that as a concept because it's always way more complex than that and we could do it in a really creative way (Zahra)

Our process of identity formation as a group became a disruption to being fixed as anything. I think of Ahmed's reflection that 'bodies take the shape of the very contact they have with objects and others' (Ahmed 2004b: 1), and how racialised individuals coming together in different ways carry transformative potential. I think this as a living out of Haraway's plea to kin-making to 'stretch the imagination and can change the story' (Haraway 2016: 103). Making kin is transgressive, is about new ways of relating to space around us, transforming environments to embody us in return. Think of Maya's frustration with the hardness of the nation, its inability *to be shaped* to include racialised people. In articulating this desire, we begin to create new spaces where the national body is contested through the making of kin, finding the collective, making our own knowledge, and fiction. In this liminality, we can build resistance.

In coming together, there is a need to explore different ways we can access experience and transform our relations to space. Part of this process requires a speculative method, articulated by Luciana Parisi as that which 'demands of thought to become felt, fact to become potential, imagination to supersede observation, object to affect method, method to become transformative of the object' (Parisi 2012: 242). In the creation of liminal spaces, we must work against the 'global racial order established by colonialism' (El-Enany 2020: 13), and in doing so build resistance to the bordering logics embedded in the lives of racialised people.

Conclusion

Bodies inherit histories; an exploration of racialisation and bordering required looking back at these histories. In the process of shifting our gaze, the border has emerged as deeply entangled with the everyday project of nation-making. Early in the research process, I considered the impact of 'irregularised' (El-Enany 2020) travel on ongoing bordering experiences through the reading group, and I came to realise that these experiences are inextricably linked with the parallel process of racialisation; both are experienced as the same mechanism. Thinking through these connections, I have extended Khosravi's argument that the nation is reproduced through the travelling body (Khosravi 2010) and argued that this process also encompasses the racialised body.

In inquiring the embodied and affective dimensions of racialisation and bordering, I have located *feeling* as integral in our social science inquiries. The act of *feeling,* I have argued, is an immense awareness of the spaces racialised people move through. Central to this, there has been an exploration of how bordering materialises through the particular figurations of paranoia, strangerhood and resistance. This has been a subversion of the myth that theory is only 'that knowledge which is created outside ourselves' (Simmonds 1997: 229). Instead, I have emphasised that lived experience can never be disembodied; it can never be separate from the body.

This article has also foregrounded the centrality of encounters, drawing on Ahmed, who reminds us that it is through encounters that 'we respond to objects and others, and how surfaces or boundaries are made; the 'I' and 'we' are shaped by, and even take the shape of contact with others' (Ahmed 2004b: 10). I have mobilised this understanding to make sense of the construction of the national space through whiteness, revealing how this results in surfacing racialised bodies as out of place. In the reading group, we expanded this argument to make sense of the subversive potential of racialised people carving spaces to think collectively outside of white hegemony. The 'I' and 'we' formed through the surfaces of each other.

Lastly, this article has highlighted the potential of spaces for racialised people that merge fiction, theory and lived experience. The collective voice of the reading group from the introduction of the zine speaks to theorising as radical practice:

> From Audre Lorde we learnt to *speak as*, this was central to our practice as a group, to find words to speak as people of colour, as migrants, as femmes, as queers, as working class, and as young people. Sara Ahmed (2017a) writes: 'It might seem like 'as' could be a restriction: implying that 'as' is all we can be. Lorde shows how it is not a restriction but an opening, a way of proceeding differently by recognising that we proceed differently, depending on where we are, on a history that is never just behind us, as it affects what happens to us' (VIII). We *speak as* with a collective vulnerability, and look forward to finding more transgressors to *speak up* with.

Our words remind me that hooks' distinction between the marginality that is 'imposed by oppressive structures and that marginality one chooses as a site of resistance' (hooks 1989: 23) is a lived negotiation. In this way, we might consider how racialised people straddle these two marginalities by temporally shifting from one to the other. We see this in the reading group's collective mediation of strangerhood, in the working of embodied experience into reparative practice, in the unfixing of identity, in the articulations of joy; all are imbued with tension. This tension speaks to the collisions between bodies and borders, to the ways the border appears through the surface of the body and how the body's surface can push against and reshape the border; such subversive bordering practices can be thought of as emerging from the margins.

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